The Cultural Setting

576 Bemba ideal behaviour is that of the *mwina umusumba* or man living at the court, as distinct from the *mwina impanga* or inhabitant of the bush; the country bumpkin.

577 565 A commoner is expected to be loyal to the death to his chief, and to accept the fact that his rulers have the right to all his time and all his possessions. He must be silent and respectful. Members of the crocodile clan are expected to be arrogant and even ruthless, but they must be generous in feeding their adherents.

888 561 Extreme deference is paid to age. Each child knows his exact position of seniority in a group of village children and is given precedence in games. Each group of men sitting in the village shelter does the same. A younger child is scolded for putting itself forward before its elders.

562 622 Bemba women share many of these ideals. They work for their chief in his gardens and make the same abject obeisance to him. They have a lively interest in the ritual centred in the court. They play an important part in attracting followers and kinsmen to a village. A headman's following or 'crowd' (*bumba*) is attracted by means of beer, good entertainment and company, and these depend both on the successful organization of labour, which is largely a man's job, and on the wise and tactful distribution of food, and happy personal relations, which are mainly in the women's sphere.

562 842 888 Women, unlike men, are admired for industry and for resource in finding food in the bush. They are honoured for bearing and rearing many children and for courage in childbirth which is often, under Bemba conditions, a terrible ordeal. They are expected to be loyal to their own sex and to accept the domination of older women.

562 644 622 In the sphere of tribal life women have an important part to play, or rather one that is thought to be important. As we saw, two senior princesses have districts of their own; and junior princesses often act as village 'headmen'. In all these cases they wield political authority but are regarded as chiefs with feminine attributes, that is to say, with more gentleness and hospitality to the needy. They are not expected to be ruthless in discipline. They have male counsellors to advise and support them. Besides these real political functions the senior women have important ritual duties since, like their 'brothers', they are in charge of

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
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which had been provided by the father of one of the girls and which was hence known as the chisungu hut. It had been cleared of all furniture and had in it nothing but a fire and the enormous water pots kept bubbling when there is any chance of their being needed for beer. The women crowded round the entrance of the hut with an air of bustle and importance. Nangoshye was shouting imperiously to all and sundry. Young girls and children were eliminated by indignant shrieks from the older women. The rest of us were pushed into the hut and crowded against the walls, leaving a rectangular space down the centre for dancing. Everyone shouted for the *banacisungu*. The two girls finally appeared covered with blankets and crawling laboriously on all fours backwards under the guidance of some of the younger helpers. The women broke into one of the first of the chisungu songs (No. 1 of Appendix B):

'*How are we going in?*'

'*We are going in as through a tunnel into a secret place.*'

('They are crawling as though they were monkeys.' 'What are they doing it for?' 'Oh! just to make the girls look stupid, just to make us laugh.')[1]

The hierarchy of the elders. The ceremony opened with a ritual representation of the hierarchy of rank among the women present. It was the first of one of the series of such acts that took place over and over again throughout the ceremony. Nangoshye squatted on her toes with her knees bent and jogged up and down to the drums. She picked up in her mouth two small enamel bowls that covered baskets of seeds. Picking up one of the baskets in her mouth, she offered it to the oldest woman present and the latter, in turn, started jogging up and down and offering the basket to the women below her in rank and so on in exact order of age.

('We are honouring the great ones, these are the big *banacimbusa* from the district.' 'Why?' 'We just have to honour them' (*Tule bacindikafye*) said with an impatient shrug at my stupidity.)

[1] *Subsequent Bemba interpretation.* The girls are crawling in backwards, i.e. they are forsaking their old way of life. They are made to look ridiculous and to do unusual things. They are crawling stealthily like monkeys who go out to steal something. They are crawling under blankets, i.e. concealed from others (P.B.M.). They are passing through a tunnel, a dark place into the initiation hut, i.e. into the heart of the mysteries, the knowledge of how to build up their future homes (A.C.).

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
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881 labour of the younger generation—of particular importance. 842 There may also be a correlation between fertility rites and matri- 182 lineal descent and in fact such a correlation seems to hold good in Central Africa (see Appendix A). Bemba believe that the child is entirely formed from the physical contribution of the mother and not the father, and similar beliefs may hold in the other matrilineal tribes in the area. It is moreover common to find in primitive society that the woman is regarded as solely responsible for the failure of a couple to produce children. Impotence in man is recognized but not sterility. In patrilineal Bantu societies it is common practice for the man's agnatic kinsmen to provide bride-wealth for him to secure him a wife. If she proves barren the cattle or other objects are commonly returned or another girl provided [611] from the same lineage group. In a matrilineal society of the Bemba type the situation is rather different. The children of a marriage belong legally to the girl's family and it is to their gain if she produces children. This fact may account for the great care and attention given to fertility rites for girls among such people. The correlation of matrilineal descent with an emphasis on fertility is a hypothesis which will have to be tested more carefully in other areas. It would, of course be possible to relate the high infantile [165] mortality rate that exists among the Bemba to their desire for children and their anxiety over them. This is in fact what many Bemba do. I have for instance been told in answer to a challenging question of mine about the protective rites performed for children. 'Well! Just look what a lot of our children die'. However, high infantile mortality rates are too common in Bantu society for this to be more than a contributory cause to the desire for fertility.

881 The salient features of Bemba social structure are also reflected 182 in this ritual. The characteristic attitudes to authority in this very 622 hierarchical society are expressed in ceremonies by which chiefs are created and maintained in their supernatural powers, and in those economic and other ceremonies performed by the chiefs themselves. The chisungu is not specially concerned with political life although some of the pottery emblems 'teach' the girl to honour the chiefs.

881 However, the hierarchy based on age, which is also character- 182 istic of every type of structured relationship among the Bemba, is 561

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one of those which is frequently symbolized in the chisungu by the offering of food in order of age; by acts of obeisance to seniors; by the singing over and over again of the song about the immutability of precedence based on age, which runs 'The arm-pit cannot be higher than the shoulder'. The girl's proper conduct is expressed in the phrase 'be submissive, or make yourself soft and pliant before your elders' (*ukunakila kubakalamba*).

There is in fact a greater expression of the principle of precedence by age in the chisungu than in the chiefly rites themselves. This may be due to the fact that all rites of role assumption naturally give importance to age since it is those who have already assumed the senior role who can hand it on to the juniors. It is also true that Bemba girls are not removed from their own family to be put under the control of their mothers-in-law as in a patrilineal society, but they are placed under the authority of different older women in their own and other villages. Some of these are related to the girls and some are not. It must be remembered too that the chisungu is a public ceremony given over to teaching while most of the chiefly rites are done in secret and people merely assume that they have been correctly carried out.

Turning now to the social groups based on descent, it is worth noting that there is very little ritual expression of clan or lineage unity in the chisungu in spite of the fact that it deals with marriage and procreation. The principle of matrilineal descent is very strongly held here in spite of the domestic authority the father manages to win, which is greater than that reported from other matrilineal peoples in the area such as the Yao. The dogma as to the nature of biological descent was never questioned during my visit or the belief that the woman was responsible for the production of the child.[1] Exogamy rules within the clan are carefully kept, and clan greetings used. Yet although in some Bantu societies clan and lineage precedence is expressed in first-fruit ceremonies and members of different clans sit apart in clearly marked groups at tribal rites, in Lubemba there is no ritual ex-

[1] I quote in my article on the Bemba in *African Political Systems* edited by E. E. Evans-Pritchard and M. Fortes, 1939, (p. 97) an amazed comment made by a patrilineal Ngoni about Bemba beliefs on the subject: 'If I have a bag and put money in it, the money belongs to me. But the Bemba say a man puts semen into a woman and yet the children belong to the woman, not to the man.'

167 by which a young son-in-law is gradually incorporated into his wife's group is therefore altered. The young wife remains behind with her own people
593 and not with her in-laws and thus, perhaps, is in a happier position than she would be in a patrilineal society; but Read considers that the brides are better looked after among the patrilineal Ngoni, where a woman's in-laws have made a considerable marriage payment for her and conceive it to be their duty to look after her while her husband is away.(1)

AGE SETS AND ASSOCIATIONS

561 Age is not stressed as a principle of social grouping. Precedence is reckoned on the basis of seniority and, as among other peoples, there are
[881] special terms for the various stages of life, but there are no boys' initiation ceremonies and no regiments based on age such as are found among the Nilo-Hamitic groups in East Africa. The existence of certain occupational
575 groups, as fishing communities, and of associations, such as those of iron-workers among the Aushi and Chishinga, has already been noted. While there are no secret societies among the Bemba, the Twa in the swamps of Bangweulu were renowned for *Butwa*, a secret society whose influence at one time extended the length of the Luapula river on both banks as far as Lake Mweru. Among the tribes affected by the cult were the Aushi, Unga, Shila, Tabwa in the group at present under consideration, and also the Lamba and Lunda.(2) It is suggested that in its original form *Butwa* is now extinct,(3) but it is uncertain whether it still exists in a modified form. Membership was not restricted by age or sex and people were initiated into the mysteries at a festival which lasted several days. The avowed aims of the society were to suppress selfishness and promote social life and its main attractions seem to have been dancing, singing, beer drinks and sexual licence; there was also considerable prestige attached to the ability to converse in the secret language *Lubendo*.

LOCAL AND TERRITORIAL GROUPING

361 The basic residential group is the village - a collection of 30 to 50 huts in the case of a commoner and several times this number in the case of a chief. All these peoples live in villages rather than isolated homesteads, but the size of the villages and their propinquity vary widely from area to area; Bemba villages, for instance, are often 16 to 20 miles apart.

621 The village normally develops as a kinship unit. It can come into
624 existence when a middle-aged or elderly man feels he has a sufficient following of relatives to justify his application to the chief for permission to set up a community of his own. While it is generally built close to relatives, the abundance of land makes it possible to build anywhere within the chief's administrative district. The nucleus is the headman's own matrilocal extended family composed of his young married daughters and their children, together with members of his matrilineage such as his widowed sisters and their sons and daughters. The number of relatives attached to a headman varies with his popularity and efficiency. A man may also succeed to the headmanship of a village by taking the name of his maternal grandfather or maternal uncle by the *kupyanika* system already referred to (see p.15). A

(1) Quoted by Richards, 1940.
(2) Anon. N.A.D.A., 1948. (3) Brelsford, 5, 1946, p.14.

342 361 compact, and sun-dried brick is increasingly being used in building. Appendages usually include a raised granary-storehouse, a platform for drying cassava, a kitchen, goat-and-sheep pen and latrine. Fishing camps are of more flimsy construction consisting of wattle-and-daub or grass shelters.

361 621 On the left bank of the Luapula, where the density of the population and its mobility are less, greater concentrations of kinsfolk occur in the villages, which are more isolated and irregularly distributed.

542 545 In polygynous households there is a house for each wife. An open space is left in front of the headman's hut which otherwise does not differ from the others. There are bachelor huts (*itanda*, pl. *amatanda*) for boys but few for girls.

361 722 During the Yeke raids the population was concentrated in some dozen stockaded villages.

361 Village-gardens are occasionally enclosed as a precaution against the bush-pig, especially near Lake Mweru. Each village has its own landing-stage (*cabu*).

621 People are now free to build where they wish and the tendency for houses of kinsfolk to be grouped together is disappearing. As the Watch Tower movement developed separate villages were set up by believers who cultivated and harvested in the fields communally.(1)

INITIATION RITES

881 Initiation rites were more elaborate for girls than for boys. Girls still undergo *cisungu*, a *rite de passage*, common to the Bemba-speaking peoples but not found among the Luba, which aims at preparing them for their future life and duties as housewives and mothers. The instruction is imparted by the *Banacimbusa*, matrons and midwives.

[304] There are now no initiation ceremonies for boys. Lunda boys were formerly circumcised at 14-16 years of age(2) in a *mushitu* (thicket) in the Nshinda swamp. No parallel operation was performed on girls.

561 The society is not formally differentiated on the basis of age, and there are no indications of the existence of an age-set organisation.

SECRET SOCIETIES

575 Of the secret societies the *Butwa*(3) was open to both sexes. *Bulindu* is described as a women's society.(4) The *Butwa*, believed to have originated among the Twa of Lake Bangweulu and to have been established in the country prior to the arrival of the Bemba-speaking peoples,(5) had lodges "along the entire length of the Luapula as far as Lake Mweru on both the British and the Belgian sides"(6) in 1914. "Nkuba is the recognised

(1) Quick, 1940, p.221.
(2) Burton, p.128.
(3) Campbell, 1, 1914.
(4) Crawford, 2, p.129.
(5) According to Campbell. Another version is that it came "with the migratory tribes of the Kazembe's, the Walunda and the Wausi, from the west about 1760." (Gouldsbury and Sheane, 1911, p.260.)
(6) Campbell, op.cit., p.77.

7:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1940 FQ5 Bemba FQ5

554 565 royal princesses are also entitled to honour, as well as those of wives of chiefs and even consorts of princesses. It will be seen, therefore, that the royal rank is a very large one. Any one who can possibly claim connexion of any sort with any chief, dead or living, does so, although the perquisites of rank are in most cases honour only and the possible favours of the chief, rather than any material assets. Every one outside the royal clan, or *ulupwa*, is an *umupabi*, or 'ordinary person', and in old days there was a slave class below—men and women captured in battle or enslaved to their own people for some crime. These individuals were known [578 567] as *bashya*. The term is now used as an opprobrious epithet especially for foreigners—often assumed to have been enslaved by the Bemba formerly. Slavery itself no longer exists.

●561 (4) *Other Principles of Social Grouping*. Age is not a principle of social grouping among the Bemba. Precedence is reckoned on the basis of seniority, as in most Bantu societies, and there are special terms used to describe the different stages of life, suckling, infant, child, adolescent, unmarried, married, old, &c. But there [88] are no regiments based on age, as in South and parts of East Africa, and the boys initiation ceremonies so often found associated with such institutions do not exist among this group of the Central Bantu.

571 There are no occupational groups, with the exception of certain specialist fishing communities on the banks of the big rivers, and in the old days there were specialist hunters of big game. Secret societies, such as the *ubutwa*, which is common among neighbouring tribes over the Congo border, and has been adopted by the Bisa of the swamps, do not seem to have been introduced among the Bemba.

105 To conclude, Bemba society is as yet undifferentiated to any large extent. The tribe is an outgrowth of a lineage-group which has occupied its present territory for 200 to 300 years, and has remained more or less homogeneous. The original kinship structure is still apparent. All the social groups to which a man belongs are ultimately based on kinship—whether it is his household village or descent group, and there are no other forms of association such as age-sets to cut across this original grouping by descent. Rank consists of membership of the clan of the first immigrants to enter the land.

(*c*) *Economic Background*. The Bemba are an agricultural people